

THE TRUST PROTOCOL

The Key to Building
Stronger Families, Teams,
and Businesses

MAC RICHARD



BakerBooks

a division of Baker Publishing Group

www.BakerBooks.com

Mac Richard, *The Trust Protocol*
Baker Books, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 2017. Used by permission.

(Unpublished manuscript—copyright protected Baker Publishing Group)

© 2017 by Mac Richard

Published by Baker Books
a division of Baker Publishing Group
PO Box 6287, Grand Rapids, MI 49516-6287
www.bakerbooks.com

Printed in the United States of America

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—for example, electronic, photocopy, recording—without the prior written permission of the publisher. The only exception is brief quotations in printed reviews.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data is on file at the Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

ISBN 978-0-8010-1964-7

Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are from the Holy Bible, New International Version®. NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. www.zondervan.com

Scripture quotations labeled NLT are from the *Holy Bible*, New Living Translation, copyright © 1996, 2004, 2015 by Tyndale House Foundation. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Carol Stream, Illinois 60188. All rights reserved.

The Proprietor is represented by The FEDD Agency, Inc.

17 18 19 20 21 22 23 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

In keeping with biblical principles of creation stewardship, Baker Publishing Group advocates the responsible use of our natural resources. As a member of the Green Press Initiative, our company uses recycled paper when possible. The text paper of this book is composed in part of post-consumer waste.



Mac Richard, *The Trust Protocol*
Baker Books, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 2017. Used by permission.

(Unpublished manuscript—copyright protected Baker Publishing Group)

For Julie

Contents

- Foreword by Andy Andrews 11
- Acknowledgments 15
- Introduction 19
1. “I Love You, and I Will Fire You”: *Introducing the Trust Protocol* 23
 2. The Battle of the *Why*: *Establishing and Evaluating Motive* 35
 3. The Revolution Will Not Be Sanitized: *Embracing Messiness* 47
 4. The Gift of Betrayal: *Leveraging the Pain of Broken Trust* 57
 5. It’s the Relationship, Stupid: *The Foundation of Everything That Lasts* 71
 6. You Have to Try! *Taking a Shot against All Odds* 85

Contents

7. The Best Teacher You Ever Had: *Seeking and Accepting Accountability* 97
 8. The Chicken or the Egg? Yes: *Choosing to Trust before the Evidence Is All In* 109
 9. “How Many Can You Do When You’re Tired?” *Choosing Grit over Quit* 119
 10. “Stay on the Bar!” *Building a Community of Trust* 133
 11. But I Live in the Real World: *Benefiting the Bottom Line* 141
 12. Staying Power: *Cultivating Strength through Trust* 151
 13. No Exceptions: *Why the Trust Protocol Works—Every Time* 161
- Notes 171

Foreword

Have you ever met someone with whom you shared an instant connection? Yep. Me too.

Have you ever met someone with whom you instantly connected and, in the days and weeks that followed, kept in touch with that person and became real, actual friends? Good. Again, me too.

Okay . . . how about this: Have you ever met someone, instantly connected, and in the days and weeks that followed, talked on the phone twice and had lunch together once before booking airline tickets for your family to go out of the country with that person and their spouse? And stay in the same house together? For a week?

You're a "no" on that one? Well, I'm a "yes." Because that is exactly what happened when I met Mac Richard.

In truth, I don't really remember the moment we met. I've known the man for only ten years or so, but I *feel* like we've been buddies for much longer. It's an odd thing, I know, but sometimes I have to make myself remember that I did not grow up with Mac. I didn't meet him until I was in my forties.

The same goes for Mac's wife, Julie, even though my wife, Polly, and I tell folks that we have known Julie for years. Of course, I'm sure we are no different from anyone else fortunate enough to spend an hour with Julie. She makes it easy to feel as though you have known her for years.

Curiously, I believe that how they are—the way Mac and Julie live their lives—makes it very easy to bond quickly with them. There is a spark in their spirit, an openness about them, a magnetic joy that makes one feel as though . . . well, like you've known them your entire life.

Actually, I suppose you'd *have* to feel like you knew someone a long time to go away together for a week . . . staying in the same place . . . no locked doors between you at night . . . with your children there as well . . . sheesh!

To even attempt this scenario would require a whole lot of trust on the part of someone. In fact, a lot of trust would be required of *everyone*.

Doesn't it take time to trust someone? you ask. That is what we seem to believe, and partly because of that I'll respond with "Usually, yes." Most of us consider trust to be built slowly, with verification, and in degrees. Like the finest Middle Eastern balsamic or the most expensive German Riesling, trust is created by a combination of things and, while the end result is almost magical, the process cannot be rushed.

So, if trust cannot be rushed, how in the world was it possible for Polly to have been thrilled to have a couple—a couple she had only met one time—join our family *on the only vacation* we would ever take celebrating our twenty-fifth wedding anniversary? At the end of the day, I suppose, one could say that it was because my wife trusts *me*. She trusts

my discernment and my judgment. But wait . . . she trusted *my* judgment? That's nice, but all I did was trust Mac.

Here, I believe, is the best question you could ask about that situation: Andy, why did you trust Mac right away?

Why? First, know this: should you decide to search and find the answer to that question, and should you choose to incorporate its principles into your everyday thought process—the answer will, quite literally, change your life and legacy.

At this present time, there are certain relationship realities, personal outcomes, and professional results in your life that, for the most part, you have considered adequate. That is all about to change. The answer to the question above possesses the power to initiate a seismic shift in your thinking. At the moment you find it, there will be *recognition*.

This crucial step of identifying the answer will lead you to *comprehension*. Be warned, however. Comprehension is not your desired destination.

Comprehension is merely a foyer leading into the beautiful areas you will experience by entering the whole house of understanding. For when you possess a *deep understanding* of the principles contained in the answer, you will have a vastly different vision of the life God has planned for you and your family.

Hmm . . . you wonder . . . really? God has a life planned for my family and me?

Yes, he does, but hang on a minute. At this point, it would be irresponsible for me not to remind you that God had a promised land planned for the children of Israel too.

Unfortunately, because of a few things some of them did (that they should not have done) and a few other things some

did not do (that they *should* have done), there were actually children of Israel who lived out their days on earth without ever entering the promised land. In other words, they died never having lived the amazing life God had planned for them.

Fortunately, the answer you seek—along with answers to questions you’ve not yet asked—is explained throughout the pages of the book you hold in your hands.

I am excited about the journey you are about to take. The time and effort you invest in reading Mac Richard’s inspired work will be repaid into the countless generations of your family who follow. Though they may never know the exact words you are about to read, the effect these words will have upon their lives in the future will cause them to remember you.

Decades from now, stories will be told, and perhaps there will be a portrait of you somewhere in their homes. Family legends will emerge, as they always do, and from time to time, someone will direct a guest’s attention to the portrait. “That’s the one I was telling you about,” they’ll say. “That’s who pointed our family in a direction. That is who made certain that we all understood the Trust Protocol.”

Andy Andrews

Acknowledgments

It's more than a little overwhelming to realize how many people helped, coached, prodded, critiqued, encouraged, and challenged me to finally bring this book into the world. It's even more overwhelming to realize I can never repay them, but my gratitude is deep and real.

To Chad Allen and his amazing team at Baker Books, thank you for taking a shot on a first-time author and believing not only in this book and what it can be but also in me personally. Your hand and patience in helping me navigate the publishing waters for the first time were invaluable.

To Jack Kuhatschek, your editing expertise was only surpassed by your grace and humor. I actually looked forward to receiving your notes and critiques, not only because they were sorely needed but also because they were always delivered with humor and encouragement.

To Esther Fedorkevich, I'm incredibly grateful for your pull-no-punches, cut-to-the-chase style and the drive you brought to making this a reality. Thanks too to everyone at

Acknowledgments

the Fedd Group and for your excitement, proficiency, and skill. I had a ball getting to do this with you.

Andy Andrews, I could never ever, ever, ever have known how faxing something from the Orange Beach, Alabama, Pack & Mail would turn into one of the great blessings and friendships of my and my family's lives. Your constant encouragement, hard-won wisdom, and deep well of experience were fuel to my fire. You and Polly, Austin and Adam mean the world to us.

Web Smith, you not only trained me and honed my cat-like quickness, you also pushed me to write and tell stories that help people.

Pastors David and Lisa Hughes, your no-matter-what friendship through thick and thin came into our lives when Julie and I needed it most. As David says, "The only thing wrong with our friendship is that we haven't known each other for forty years."

Ben Young, your friendship and mentorship since I was in sixth grade all the way to this day and this book are absolutely priceless. Through every season of life, you've been a friend I could trust, learn from, and laugh with. I'll take a Diablo sandwich and a Dr Pepper . . . YOU WANT SOMETHIN'??

Dr. and Mrs. Ed Young, through Second Baptist Church in Houston, you showed me what it means to *be* the church when the world crumbled under our family's feet in seventh grade. You taught me and showed me what it means to have a relationship with Christ, you were the vehicle through whom God called me to pastoral ministry, and you're the reason I met Julie Sanderson. Your commitment to God, each other, your family, Scripture, and evangelism are examples we draw from every day and will for the rest of our lives.

Acknowledgments

Pastors Ed and Lisa Young, you took me—literally, right out of college—into your home and your lives and showed Julie and me what it looks like to love and lead at home and in the church. Ed, you got me hooked on tarpon fishing and fishing for men. Your friendship and the years we've shared are our greatest blessing outside of our immediate family. You're my pastor, Pastor!

To the Lake Hills Church family, for someone who speaks for a living, it's so difficult to put into words how grateful we are for you. For your love, your faithfulness, the witness and safe place you provided Emily and Joseph as they grew up, and so much more, thank you. We love you and can't wait to see what God has prepared for us to do together over the next twenty years and beyond!

Gill and Patrick, your friendship, love, and laughter have been the greatest blessing a brother could ask for. I'm proud to be your brother.

Mom, you taught me the love and power of words. You are the greatest teacher I've ever had or known. But more than anything, you taught three boys unconditional love. You stayed. You stayed, you prayed, you worked, and you fought, and you showed us how to love, no matter what. We never would've made it without you. To raise three sons by yourself who all turned out to be more or less contributing members of society, married to godly wives, and enjoying the blessings of family you missed is a legacy we can only hope to emulate. I love you.

Emily and Joseph, thank you for being more than your mom and I knew enough to pray for. Watching you step more and more fully into who God created you to be is the greatest reward and biggest payoff we've ever known.

Acknowledgments

And, above all, to Julie—I love you with everything I have. The first twenty-six years have been so far above and beyond anything I could imagine or ask for. Your faith, joy, beauty, intelligence, work ethic, sense of humor, loyalty, and wisdom—the Proverbs 31 woman can't even see your tail-lights. You're just the best.

Introduction

About the time Julie and I moved to Austin, we discovered that a very close friend of ours was a habitual liar. I don't mean that he was an acquaintance or someone we knew in passing. I mean our families prayed together, did life together, and were fully invested in each other's lives.

A mutual friend had uncovered his trail of deceit and then called us to describe the long and winding road of lies and fabrications he had paved. The scope of this dishonesty ran from the mundane to the majestic. Everything from his résumé to his daily routine was a patchwork of minor falsehoods and outright fraud.

And we never saw it coming.

His integrity was considered absolutely above reproach. We all thought he was a godly, diligent, and successful over-achiever who was setting an ethical pace for the rest of us to follow.

We were both rocked to the core. Because the allegations were so disorienting, my first thought was, *There's no way*

this is true . . . someone's setting him up. Maybe even the friend who told us.

My mind was racing trying to discern who was really telling the truth: Was it the friend who claimed this guy was a habitual liar? Was the alleged habitual liar being set up for some nefarious reason that I couldn't imagine? For forty-five minutes, of all the people in my day-to-day world, Julie was the only person I *knew* I could trust. It felt like the earth was shifting under my feet, and I couldn't find anywhere stable to stand.

This book is about what took place on the other side of those forty-five minutes.

Since 2000, the Edelman Trust Barometer has surveyed thousands of people around the world gauging their confidence in government, businesses, media, and nongovernment organizations (NGOs). For the first time ever, the 2017 Edelman Trust Barometer found that trust in all four categories fell from the previous year. Fewer than half of those surveyed expressed even an average level of trust in those institutions.¹

The political rise of both Bernie Sanders and Donald Trump in the 2016 presidential campaign revealed a visceral disconnect created almost exclusively by politicians repeatedly breaking trust with the electorate. Too many athletes to count who were once celebrated for their exploits on the field have been humiliated by revelations of their deliberate cheating and have damaged the integrity of the games they play. A fraction of the clergy has not only forfeited its authority to lead spiritually by preying on children, but a significant contingent also conspired to hide and often perpetuate colleagues' predatory behavior across generations.

These cultural and institutional examples, as toxic and demoralizing as they are, actually reflect what we know to be true personally: trust is a fragile thing.

And this is our great opportunity.

When we commit ourselves to being people of trust, we build, strengthen, and fortify the very thing that holds homes, neighborhoods, businesses, and teams together. When we hold each other accountable and allow ourselves to be held accountable, we begin to solidify the relational ground under our feet. And when the relational ground is stable, everything is stronger, healthier, and better. All of a sudden, the trust generated between a husband and wife or a parent and child begins to spill over into our neighborhoods and schools. People who cultivate trust in their personal lives and most intimate relationships attract like-minded people. When they go into business together or partner together on projects and deals, they develop and distribute more of that trust, and everyone benefits.

As I processed through the doubt and uncertainty prompted by our friend's deceit, I began to pray through not only my emotions—which were redlining at the moment—but also through the facts that I knew. The inconsistencies and patterns of deceit were undeniable, but I still wondered, *Could they have been orchestrated by our friend who discovered them?*

Then I realized something: for him to have orchestrated and substantiated those accusations would have required an elaborate conspiracy with multiple other people being in on it. And they were all people whom we had known for years. It was the fact of the collective trust all those other people had amassed over the years that revealed beyond a reasonable

doubt who was trustworthy and who was not. In the ensuing weeks and months, all the facts exposed the truth that had been only partially revealed initially.

John Adams said, “Facts are stubborn things; and whatever may be our wishes, our inclinations, or the dictates of our passion, they cannot alter the state of facts and evidence.”²

Our faith is proved by our actions: *faith without works is dead*. Faith *with* works is alive and vital, powerful and effective, beautiful and strong. Faith with works improves and enriches every relationship, team, church, business, neighborhood, and school it impacts.

Welcome to the Trust Protocol.

1

“I Love You, and I Will Fire You”

Introducing the Trust Protocol

Straight out of college, I got the kind of opportunity that most graduates only dream of. I was the third person hired by a start-up that erupted in exponential growth. The job found me before I graduated because of a friendship with the guy who would become the leader of this start-up. We were all overworked and underpaid, and we wouldn't have traded it for anything else in the world. I loved what I was doing, the adventure of doing something new and unknown, and the people. In the words of one early associate, it was a “rocket ship.”

One day Ed called me into his office. I came in, and he asked me to close the door behind me. I sat down for what I thought would be one of our usual conversations: how things were going in my department, what was up with my

girlfriend, or some new initiative/event/strategy that he had cooked up. At the time, Ed was only twenty-nine years old, but even then he had a natural leadership presence, the ability to cut through clutter, a monster work ethic, and a passion that was infectious. The conversation went like this:

Ed: Mac, sit down. I want to talk to you. You know I love that you're here.

Mac: Thanks, I appreciate it. I love being here, and I'm having a ball.

Ed: Man, I'm glad. I really believe in you and think you've got amazing potential. And you know I think you're a great guy. [Did I mention he was very perceptive? I was so green I never saw the big hairy "but" that was obviously lurking in this opening statement.] But you need to understand something: I love you, and I will fire you.

Mac: [internally] *Well, then could you maybe love me just a little less?*

Ed: I can't keep paying you just because you're a good guy. You've got too much talent, and we've got too much to do for me to let you get by without producing something and being a contributor around here. You've got great potential, but from now on, *potential* is profanity for you. All it means is that you haven't done anything yet.

I won't bore you with the rest of the conversation, except to say that he did not fire me, though he would've been more than justified on more than a few occasions. And almost twenty years later, we remain very close. Our friendship has

not only survived, it has also thrived, not in spite of that conversation and others like it but largely because of them.

Would it surprise you to know that the start-up was actually a church? Or that Ed was the pastor of that church? I mean, what *pastor* says, “I love you, and I will fire you”? The pastor was—and is—Ed Young, and the church is Fellowship Church, which began in Dallas–Ft. Worth and now has locations across the country and is one of the most innovative, influential churches of this generation.

I would love to tell you that in that moment I realized God was using Ed to shape me and mold me, so I joyfully submitted. The reality, though, is that I did exactly what most of us do when we feel threatened or vulnerable: I read the situation through the lens of self—specifically, self-protection and self-preservation. I feared for my job, worried about where I would go should I actually get fired, and was unsure how I would explain losing my first job right out of college.

But in God’s truly amazing grace, another lesson revealed itself through that same lens of self. I realized that staying in that situation, working for Ed, and submitting to his leadership, in addition to being the right thing to do was actually in my best interest. Where else would someone have more of my best interest at heart? Where else would I never have conflict or disagreement? Where else could I find someone with whom I always agreed? I realized that I would get better, I would be better, if I let him hold me accountable and push me.

What I couldn’t know at the time was that that defining moment early in my ministry was carving in stone for me the absolute, undeniable power of the Trust Protocol.

The Trust Protocol

In Hebrews 10:24, the Bible challenges Christ followers: “And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds.” In that simple, one-sentence exhortation, God asserts and reinforces the Trust Protocol, which is essential and fundamental to all he has called us to be and do in relationship with him. Not only is it woven into every page and principle of Scripture, it is also absolutely essential to everything that really matters to us—our families and relationships, our vocation and work, our purpose and fulfillment. The power of this Protocol can actually help us point people toward a relationship with Christ *before* they ever discover that the Bible is reliable.

There are a few things you need to know before we dive into the Trust Protocol:

1. The Trust Protocol works. Every single time. We’ll talk about why this is true in detail in the last chapter. But for now, just know that whenever we choose to put it into effect, regardless of the context or circumstances, it produces results so powerful, so beautiful that nothing else compares to it. No exceptions.
2. The Trust Protocol is hard work. There’s just no way around it. This is not a game for the faint of heart or the timid. For this to work, we have to roll up our sleeves and put our spiritual, emotional, and relational—and sometimes, even our physical—weight into it.
3. The Trust Protocol will get messy. By virtue of the fact that it calls for fallen and fallible people to truly engage with one another, just know that it will get messy at some points along the way.

And perhaps most important,

4. The work, the mess, the pain and uncertainty along the way—all of it—is absolutely worth it. If you’re currently participating in the Trust Protocol (though you may never have used that terminology), you’re going to be affirmed and encouraged throughout this book. If you’ve not used it intentionally or consistently, you’re going to discover the supernatural blessing that God pours out on every relationship, enterprise, and exercise that practices the Protocol.

I want to set your expectations before we actually begin so that, should you choose to participate in the Protocol, you do so with your eyes wide open and are as prepared as you can be for what follows.

What exactly is the Trust Protocol? It is simply this: *forging credibility through integrity and action*. It is deliberately demonstrating our dependability to the people with whom we live, work, love, and serve—when we excel and, especially, when we struggle. It is backing up our talk with our walk. It is being consistently the same person we were created to be no matter where we are or whom we are with.

The Trust Protocol calls us to a higher plane of relational responsibility. Instead of assigning blame and fault to others for disasters and disappointments, practitioners of the Protocol assume *accurate and appropriate* ownership for their role in those failures and learn from their mistakes. Instead of blithely getting through another day of the status quo, the Trust Protocol propels us through intentional interactions that invigorate community, connectedness, and

collaboration. This relational responsibility feeds the fire of trust and smokes out those unwilling to pay the price to stoke that fire.

Everything in life that really matters radiates out of relationships. From the lunchroom to the locker room, from the bedroom to the boardroom, regardless of the arena or the endeavor, relationship is the coin of the realm. And trust, or credibility, is the tie that binds every relationship, from the most casual acquaintance, to the marketplace, to the most intimate and personal connections of marriage and family.

The Universal Value of Trust

By any objective standard, my wife, Julie, and I live in the greatest city in the world. Austin, Texas, is home to the weird, the wonderful, and the wacky of every imaginable stripe. Every year, Austin welcomes tens of thousands of new residents from around the world chasing the dream of launching technology start-ups. Many of these new arrivals can describe in vivid detail what their businesses will do and who their target market might be, and their businesses are as varied and diverse as the imaginations that dream them up. But whenever I ask about their challenges, what might be their obstacles to growth or corporate survival, without exception they point to interpersonal issues as the primary impediment to organizational success.

Interestingly, but not surprisingly, those are the same challenges and issues that churches struggle with. The preaching, connecting and assimilating, discipling, mission strategizing—these are easy in comparison with the people issues that we encounter on a regular basis. I've noticed a common thread

that runs through every single industry, enterprise, and vocation: people. No matter what we do or where we do it, we’re all in the people business, and how we navigate the relational waters of our everyday lives is the single greatest propellant or deterrent to how successful, how fulfilled, how peaceful, and how effective we will be.

Relationships come in all shapes and sizes, with wildly varying needs, expectations, and requirements. But deliberately and intentionally forging credibility that anchors the Trust Protocol boils down to a single, simple element: integrity. Every relationship, no matter how superficial and temporary, or long-term and intimate, can be rock solid *if* it is built on a foundation of integrity.

Relationships are unavoidable. Relationships of integrity are invincible. Integrity, which we’ll cover later in more detail, means so much more than mere honesty or ethical behavior. Those things do matter, and they’re mandatory for our relational and professional success over time. But if we limit the meaning to merely telling the truth and honoring our contracts—legal or relational—then we’ve set the bar far too low for what God declares our integrity standard to be.

Foundations of the Trust Protocol

When I was in the sixth grade, Dr. Edwin Young (Ed’s dad) had become the pastor of my home church, Second Baptist Church, in Houston. Almost immediately, Dr. Young cranked up our church’s engine, excitement, and impact. At the time, Ed was a senior in high school who was about to depart for Florida State University where he would play basketball on scholarship.

Over the next few years, Ed would be the counselor we would fight to have on Beach Retreat, our annual summer camp. He would sneak us out in the middle of the night to go get breakfast at Mr. Z's, South Padre Island's finest all-night diner. We fished in the resort's pond. From our condo's balcony! Since it was the early '80s, Ed lathered up in sunscreen, tied a black headband around his head, and brandishing an M-16 water gun stormed the beach for freedom, justice, and the American way, a la Rambo.

The summer before my senior season of high school basketball, Ed stopped me and told me he was going to start training me in the church's weight room. Every day, we'd meet in that shed, and he'd put me through reps and sets he'd learned at Florida State. On the opening night of the season, my Lee Generals squared off against Ed's alma mater Memorial High School, and there was Ed in the stands, watching and cheering me on.

We reconnected when Ed returned to finish college in Houston after marrying Lisa and joined the staff at Second Baptist. I'd regularly stop by his converted office above the sanctuary, attend retreats that he planned as our college minister, and would house-sit for him and Lisa when they went on vacation.

By the time Ed looked across his desk and said, "I love you, and I will fire you," we had accumulated more than ten years of shared history, relationship, and life. I knew that he did in fact love me. And I sensed a very real sincerity that he would in fact fire me. In short, I trusted him.

The Trust Protocol is an absolute nonnegotiable in every enterprise and exercise that matters. Partnerships that practice the Protocol persist. They survive economic downturns

and pricing wars, damaging words, thoughtlessness, out-of-the-ordinary unkindnesses, and frequently even out-and-out betrayals. The beautiful power of the Trust Protocol lies in the fact that it is available to anyone and everyone who wants to make a difference in this world:

- The fourth-grade teacher who has influenced and inspired generations of students to enjoy learning and seek out new subjects to study
- The husband and wife who not only stay together for a lifetime but who actually enjoy each other as much in their seventies as they did on their honeymoon
- The entrepreneurial business owner whose employees know that their boss takes home less money personally so they can participate in the company’s profit-sharing program
- The church that evolves across decades and remains a lighthouse and beacon of hope as their neighborhood shifts demographically

These and so many others are practitioners of the Protocol.

A *protocol* is simply a predetermined procedure or set of rules. It establishes a process or system, whether in diplomatic circles or scientific and medical experiments. Protocols also play a role in spycraft. Think Jack Bauer and Chloe O’Brian in *24* or Carrie Mathis and Saul Berenson in *Homeland*. When Saul walks past an operative in a crowded European town square, the red carnation in his lapel indicates that their mission is a “go.” Protocols provide next steps in if-then sequences: if *this* happens, then *that* should follow.

The Trust Protocol is an if-then sequence: if love, then good deeds. Everywhere the Trust Protocol is practiced, love and good deeds are always at work. Here's why: love without action is bankrupt, and action without love is hollow. But together, love and good deeds conspire to cultivate trust and unity that change everything they touch for the better.

This was the exact tension Ed was living in and living out that day he called me into his office. There was genuine love and concern for me as a person, friend, and leader-in-training. But his investment in me as a person didn't eclipse his larger responsibility to the church as a whole.

It was his responsibility for both me personally and the church at large that compelled him to hold my feet to the fire—to hold me accountable for my actions (or lack thereof). He made the time to spur me to good deeds precisely *because* he loved me and cared about growth and development and productivity—both mine and the church's. It wasn't that he would fire me *despite* his love for me. Rather, he was willing to go through the relational discomfort *because* he loved me. He wouldn't allow me to settle for some warm and fuzzy, saccharine substitute for love. He forced me to realize that if my love for people in the church and outside the church was real, then I would back it up with real action, with productivity and effectiveness. In short, with good deeds.

I'm now more than twenty years removed from that conversation, but I'm even more amazed at the extravagant goodness of God, who allows us, even *calls* us, to participate with him in the divinely ordained Trust Protocol. In those twenty intervening years, I have seen the Protocol repeatedly reap staggering results in countless homes, teams, churches, and businesses. Anywhere and everywhere that it is adopted and embraced

and practiced—parenting, ministry, the marketplace, nonprofits, even in government, politics, and athletics—everything works better.

Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. It's so simple, isn't it? But don't let simple lull you into thinking it's easy. In fact, it may be the most difficult thing in the world to do. To live out the Trust Protocol is to guarantee difficulty, hurt, heartache, disappointment, misunderstanding, restlessness, doubt, uncertainty, trauma, drama, and anger. And, *spoiler alert*: it's most difficult where it's most crucial—with the people closest to you.

But those who do practice the Protocol get to partake in the transcendent blessing and gift of genuine connectedness, eternity-shaking effectiveness, changed lives, genuine intimacy, abundant life, and the thrill of adventure.

The flip side of that coin is also true: wherever the Trust Protocol is missing, neglected, or omitted, we find brokenness, fear, resentment, callousness, isolation, and cynicism. Veteran political consultant Steve Schmidt, in the months leading up to the 2016 election, observed, "Trust has completely collapsed between every single institution—with the exception of the US military—and the American people. This has led to distrust of politicians and a belief by many that the country is headed in the wrong direction. . . . When trust collapses and institutions fail, all of the old rules are out the window."¹

Our world is literally dying for the Trust Protocol to work, which means it's time for us to get to work.